



"... Polly ... hang up on me in 30 minutes ... I have brownies in the oven."

TV CANDIDS

by Terrence O'Flaherty

June is bustin' out all over, they say in the song. But, on television, June is a month when they're closing up all over the dial.

Three of the more recent disappearing acts are "Naked City," "The Untouchables," and "U. S. Steel Hour."

All three programs are canceled and will be on reruns during the summer, to be replaced by other shows in the fall. The entire schedules of "Naked City" and "Untouchables" probably will be reshowed for years to come via the lucrative repeat circuit on independent stations.

"Naked City" will be a loss to television because it gave dignity to the police that had been long coming. During its three-year run the series actually was a Hollywood film production shot on location amid the stark realism of New York. The scripts came from California — often a page at a time — but the individual episodes had a life to them that was never evident in "The Untouchables," for example, which was filmed in Hollywood.

Much of its success came from the believability of its regular performers, Paul Burke, Horace MacMahon, Harry Bellaver and Nancy Malone. Its guest actors actors were selected with care.

"Naked City" was cancelled by ABC to make room for a new fall series set on a college campus titled "Young and the Bold."

"The U. S. Steel Hour" has been on television for a decade and had been on radio long before that. It was produced for the sponsor by the New York Theater Guild and it has been, in recent sessions, one of the very few live shows which used original drama material. The series, produced in New York, remained on the air during the summer with new programs, almost unheard of in TV.

There were memorable shows to its credit, but in recent years, many more were either undistinguished or hastily thrown together. The series pointed up one television suspicion: it is impossible for a dramatic show to be good every-other-Wednesday night for 10 years. The Theater Guild proved it.

"The Untouchables" was one of the first programs to demonstrate that Hollywood film men had mastered the technical problems of making a 50-minute feature film for television. The series bore the stamp of a Grade A gang film, slick in realism, lighting and snuck.

It was totally lacking in subtlety—both in script and acting—but there was little that was subtle about the gangland wars of Chicago's prohibition era. Robert Stack was perfect for the stellar role of Eliot Ness—rugged, competent and humorless. Needless to retell here, the series was a big popular hit.

It also was the target for much of the Government's criticism of television as a distortion of history and a purveyor of needless violence. The FCC called its producers "clearly derelict" for failing to indicate that some episodes were pure fiction, particularly those showing prison guards as corruptible in an escape of Al Capone.

The Department of Justice once intervened to cancel a program dealing with the infamous Apalachin Conference because some of its delegates were still under trial. J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI also complained.

Several Italian-American organizations made fools of themselves by forcing ABC and producer Desi Arnaz to stop using Italian names for the hoods in the series. Everybody knows that the majority of the Chicago gangsters of the era were Italians or Americans of Italian descent. You can't change history.

Long after the characters were named "Smith and Johnson" the program was still referred to by its nickname—"The Italian Family Hour." And the series was just as popular among Italians as it was with everyone else in town.

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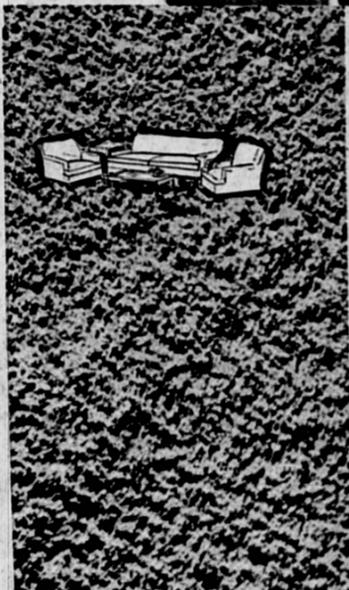
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